

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Plains wanderer male (left) and female
- photo by David Baker-Gabb

Saving grassland plains for the Plains-wanderer Peter Turner

Our guest speaker at the November meeting was Deanna Marshall, Area Manager North West for Trust for Nature. Deanna has been involved for 20 years with the challenges of saving the Plains-wanderer, through purchase of suitable grassland blocks in Northern Victoria, arranging covenants to protect suitable areas within farms, and working with farmers and Parks Victoria rangers to maintain grasslands in a state suitable for these critically endangered birds.

The Plains-wanderer, *Pedionomus torquatus*, endemic to Australia, is the only representative of the family Pedionomidae and genus *Pedionomus*. It's closest relative appears to be the seedsnipe of South America, suggesting an ancient, Gondwana lineage. The Plains-wanderer is of outstanding global significance, being ranked number one in Australia and fourth in the world on a list of 9,993 recognised bird species we can least afford to lose because of its evolutionary distinctiveness.

The female P-w, up to 19 cm high, is larger and more colourful than the male, with a black and white collar and rufous breast. She is very territorial, occupying 9-12 Ha, and may mate with several males each season. The males incubate the eggs, raising 2-5 chicks, which quickly start to forage on the seeds and insects that form the birds' diet. P-ws prefer grassland on red soils, with patches of bare soil – if the grasses grow too high (e.g., after rain) or become too sparse, the birds leave to seek better conditions. They have been recorded as moving over 100 km – e.g., from Terrick Terrick to Deniliquin. Before European settlement, they were widespread across grasslands in Victoria and the Riverina, but are now largely restricted to the Parvo Plains and similar areas in northern Victoria, and around Deniliquin. There may be about 500 breeding pairs remaining in the wild.

Suitable grassland habitats have long gone from most of the P-ws original range, and further losses continue as paddocks grazed by sheep or cattle are ploughed up for cropping. The critical status of the birds was recognized in 2015 through formation of the National Recovery Team. Trust for Nature contributes through covenants on private land, and by purchasing land for conversion into nature

reserves when Government grants have been available. Deanna and her colleagues work with farmers who are committed to preserving Plains-wanderers by managing grazing intensities on their own land, and also on public lands. This can be a complex issue, since grasses can grow rapidly after rain, so need grazing, whereas stock must be removed if they reduce the vegetation cover too much! And a ban on grazing in national parks, aimed at saving sensitive High Country environments from cattle, was a barrier to managing grasslands for Plains-wanderers until sense prevailed.

Threats to Plains-wanderers include drought and floods, predators including foxes and falcons, harriers and Wedge-tailed Eagles - the birds keep at least 200m from tall trees where raptors perch. Rabbits attract the same predators, so reducing rabbit populations helps the P-ws. Fencing off areas with red soil (which stock also prefer) to better control grazing is another approach.

Traditionally, night time spotlighting has been the way to find P-ws and estimate their numbers. This is slow, especially in areas where vehicles would cause damage to other wild life or the soil structure. Recently sound monitoring methods - song meters - have been introduced, and are proving successful. There is also a captive breeding program at Werribee and Tooronga Zoos, which is making progress – "...on November 4, four healthy Plains-wanderer chicks hatched at the Werribee Open Range Zoo. Their names: Quagmire, Jane, Ramble and Clinton." (*The Age*, 20th November 2018). Observation of captive birds are revealing many details of their behaviour.

Deanna's talk stimulated questions, and further discussions over supper. Further information is available on the Trust for Nature website, where the quarterly magazine *The Wanderer* can be accessed for detailed articles on this unique Australian bird.

December Observations (1948)

George Broadway

Insects

Geelong: A small light-brown species of Cockroach. Not all cockroaches are dark brown or black, on a recent field excursion we saw some very beautiful ones - pale blue with yellow stripes.

Lismore (NSW): Hummingbird Hawk Moth *Macroglossum hirundo*. The vernacular name comes from its habit of hovering before flowers and extending its very long proboscis to drink the nectar while making a humming sound with its rapid wing beats.

Yandiah (SA): Convolvulus Hawk Moth, one of several closely related swift-flying moths that are not uncommon in southern Australia. The camouflaged caterpillar feeds on Convolvulus or bindweed, See "Moths of Victoria" Peter Marriott, page 28.

Geelong: Tree Cricket, a relative of the grasshopper but which is predominately carnivorous, feeding on insects and grubs. This one may well have done away with some of the bees of the hive. See May NL.

Kuridala (Q): Large galls on twigs of Bloodwood were not *Apiomorpha ovata* but another species of *Apiomorpha*, the gall-making scale insect group peculiar to Australia.

Birds

Ravensthorpe (WA): The two birds were the Brown Song Lark *Cinclorhamphus cruralis*. There is a marked difference in size between male and female. The larger specimen measuring 23 cm from beak to tail was the male, and the smaller one measuring 18 cm was the female. It occurs all over Australia in suitable country.

Botanical

Auckland (NZ): The Maori story of the vegetable caterpillar is not quite correct, it is not the seed of the Rata which the Caterpillar swallows but the microscopic spores of a fungus, *Cordyceps*. which occur in the ground in which Caterpillars burrow. The fungus grows and spreads through the caterpillar's body like a disease, eventually replacing the soft parts with tough and relatively indestructible fungus tissue. When there is no caterpillar flesh left to nourish the fungus it sends up to the surface a stalk with a fruiting head from which other spores are spread to further infect the ground. Other *Cordyceps* also infect the larvae of beetles, mole crickets, etc.

General

Swan Hill: The little worm-like creature was not a legless lizard, but a true snake of the primitive worm-snake type *Typhlops*. It did in fact have a small mouth although it is so small and inconspicuously placed that it is no wonder you did not see it.

Abbotsford: Marbled Gecko Lizard *Phyllodactylus marmoratus*, sometimes called a "Wood Adder" and quite unjustifiably feared. Quite harmless.

The bone was the pelvic girdle of an emu.

Rosebud: Another specimen we have had from your part of the Bay, of the Siphon Worm, *Sipunculus*. This is a sedentary Worm which looks as though it were clothed in a suit of putty-coloured but sometimes iridescent corduroy.

The usual size is a little short of a foot (30 cm) long and about an inch (2.5cm) in diameter. The worm lives buried in sand, and siphons sea water through its body collecting the digestible organic material from it in transit.

Newport: The specimen under the cover glass of the microscope slide was not a weevil, but a mite. Your excellent sketch made identification easy. The eight legs rule out a weevil immediately, they have only six, and there is no weevil so tiny. The mount on the slide must have deteriorated, giving access to the mites. Mites are related to the Ticks and more distantly to the spiders.

The spectacle of a mosquito emerging from its pupal (Tumbler) skin is available to anyone with the patience to watch a jar of mosquito larvae and pupae and observe the dainty stepping of the slender legs from the "fairy boat" of the old pupal skin.

Hawk Moth



(Specimen: courtesy of the [The Australian Museum](#))

Fryers Ridge club excursion on 10-11-18

Richard Piesse

Quite a reasonable list considering the state of the bush; and probably a couple of weeks too late for the Fryers Ridge flowers.

<i>Lomandra multiflora</i>	Many-flowered Mat-rush
<i>Burchardia umbellata</i>	Milkmaids
<i>Dianella revoluta</i>	Black-anther Flax-lily
<i>Caladenia phaeoclavia</i>	Brown-clubbed Spider Orchid
<i>Prasophyllum affin odoratum</i>	Scented Leek-orchid
<i>Chrysocephalum semipapposum</i>	Clustered Everlasting
<i>Coronidium scorpioides</i>	Button Everlasting
<i>Craspedia variabilis</i>	Billy Buttons
<i>Leptorhyncos tenuifolius</i>	Wiry Buttons
<i>Microseris walteri</i>	Yam Daisy
<i>Ozothamnus obcordatus</i>	Grey Everlasting
<i>Senecio phelleus</i>	Slender Groundsel
<i>Xerochrysum viscosum</i>	Sticky Everlasting
<i>Brunonia australis</i>	Blue Pincushion
<i>Wahlenbergia gracilentia</i>	Annual Bluebell
<i>Wahlenbergia stricta</i>	Tall Bluebell
<i>Stackhousia monogyna</i>	Creamy Candles
<i>Hibbertia fasciculosa</i>	Bundled Guinea-flower
<i>Tetralthea ciliata</i>	Pink Bells
<i>Brachyloma daphnoides</i>	Daphne Heath
<i>Leucopogon virgatus</i>	Common Beard-heath
<i>Acacia provincialis</i>	Inland Wirilda
<i>Dillwynia sericea</i>	Showy Parrot-pea
<i>Gompholobium huegelii</i>	Wedge-pea
<i>Pultenaea humilis</i>	Dwarf Bush-pea
<i>Goodenia blackiana</i>	Black's Goodenia
<i>Gonocarpus tetragynus</i>	Common Raspwort
<i>Leptospermum myrsinoides</i>	Heath Tea-tree
<i>Oxalis perennans</i>	Wood Sorrel
<i>Poranthera microphylla</i>	Small Poranthera
<i>Rhytidosporum procumbens</i>	White Marianth
<i>Comesperma ericinum</i>	Heath Milkwort
<i>Grevillea alpina</i>	Downy Grevillea
<i>Acaena novae-zelandiae</i>	Bidgee Widgee
<i>Philothea verrucosa</i>	Fairy Wax-flower
<i>Stylidium graminifolium</i>	Narrow-leaf Trigger plant
<i>Pimelea linifolia</i>	Slender Rice-flower



Top: Scented Leek-orchid
Above: Dwarf Bush-pea
Left: Grey Everlasting



Clockwise from top left: Heath Milkwort and close-up, Narrow-leaf Trigger plant, Brown-clubbed Spider Orchid, Wedge-pea. - all photos by Noel Young, Fryers Ridge 10-11-18

Birds of Sutton Grange (October)

Nigel Harland

Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo
 Red-browed Finch
 Australian Magpie
 Laughing Kookaburra
 Brown Falcon
 Long-billed Corella
 Eastern Rosella
 Grey Shrike-thrush
 Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
 Welcome Swallow

Superb Fairy-wren
 White-browed Scrubwren
 Australian Raven
 Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
 Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
 Crimson Rosella
 Striated Pardalote
 White-faced Heron
 New Holland Honeyeater
 Wedge-tailed Eagle

About SEANA - the South East Australian Naturalists Association

SEANA (<http://seana.org.au>) is an association of affiliated natural history clubs and interested individuals. Members are located in south-eastern mainland Australia. The association was formerly known as the Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association (VFNCA).

The objects of SEANA include

- fostering and encouraging activities which promote the appreciation and study of natural history.
- supporting and promoting conservation issues.
- to be acknowledged to be a responsible voice on natural history matters.
- to improve and stimulate communication between members.

SEANA usually meets twice a year with the meeting (or campout) held in a town, at a conference centre or in an area with camping facilities. These meetings are organised by one of the member clubs.

The campouts usually have a program of events over two or more days. Events may include outings and excursions, visits to places of natural history interest and lectures and demonstrations. The meeting may also include a biological survey of an area of interest. [Extract from SEANA website].

SEANA last met in Castlemaine in 1998, so it will be 21 years between meetings hosted by CFNC when field naturalists from clubs across the state gather here on 4th October 2019 for SEANA Spring 2019. The event will continue through until mid-day Monday. The Campbells Creek Community Centre will be our base for an informal meal on Friday 4th, followed by an introductory lecture, and again on Saturday 5th for dinner and the main lecture. Full and half-day excursions will be held on both Saturday and Sunday, and on the morning of Monday 7th.

There will not be an Autumn gathering in 2019, because no club was available to host it. However, the SEANA committee has arranged a meeting in Port Fairy on 23rd March, for the SEANA AGM and expects that some local excursions will be arranged for attendees staying in Port Fairy for the weekend. If you are interested, contact Peter Turner.

Bird Quiz Nigel harland

The bird last month was the Fuscous Honeyeater. Probably the most boring of Honeyeaters.

If you see anything which looks like a Honeyeater and you are not sure what it is, it is probably a Fuscous!

The bird for this month is shown at right.



Observations at the November meeting

George: Remembering the scent of Black Wattle. **Boobook** calling near Broadway's home - not heard as often as in the past.

Geraldine: **Tuans** active around their house.

Peter: Has not seen Powerful Owls at CBG for many weeks. No one else at the meeting had either. Reported that POs were seen at Newstead.

Denis: Musk Duck at Expedition Pass Reservoir has young. Reed Warblers present also.

Rosemary T: **Purple-crowned Lorikeets** seen in flowering gum by our house. Lots of Musk Lorikeets there every day.

Geoff H: **Rufous Song-lark** at their property.

R&P Turner: **Golden Sun moths** seen on one of the fairways at Mt Alexander Golf Course on Sunday 18th. Identified from photo by Marilyn Hewish, and confirmed by Geraldine through comparison with photos taken at Muckleford in 2010.

Recent Encounters by Geraldine Harris

While checking the route for our Saturday bird count I discovered a baby Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike in the middle of Ottreys Scrub Rd. and as I approached it started to make a soft call which was answered by the parent bird in a branch high up in a nearby tree. Without touching it, I encouraged the little bird to move across to the edge of the road into the undergrowth and off the road and left the parent bird to do its job.

On our Annual Challenge Bird Count on Saturday we came across two baby choughs in litter on the ground under some eucalypts. And today (Sunday), after a wild windy night and some heavy rain, I discovered four small young birds together in low branches along Barkers Creek. At first I thought they were thornbills but they had white/pale grey breasts and very beautiful bright coral/pink rumps. Could they have been immature Diamond Firetails? Also along the creek this morning I came across a family of foxes (two adults and four young) playing rough and tumble in the sunshine together and they did not notice me until I stepped out from behind a bush about seven metres away.

I also witnessed Dusky Woodswallows swooping a Magpie and later on White-plumed Honeyeaters swooping a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike. And when I came in from gardening to wash my hands a small Peron's Tree Frog jumped up out of the plug hole and got covered in soapy water which he didn't like much so I rinsed him off and took him outside to a damp spot in the garden. And to finish off the day, when I looked out this evening there was a joey having a long drink from my birdbath while his mum waited on the lower lawn for him. Oh it is so good to be surrounded by nature!

<p>Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club</p>

Castlemaine Field Naturalists

Coming events

Fri Dec 14 meeting: Members night

Member's "show and tell" - share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. Bring a plate to share for supper. The club's laptop and projector will be available.

Fri Feb 8 is the first meeting for 2019

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2018

Ordinary membership: Single \$35, Family \$50

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2018 Committee

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